THE MEDIA SCHOOL
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

May 13, 2017

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: **GN. Docket Number 16-46**

To Whom It May Concern:

Low-income citizens experience frequent disruptions in their Internet and cellphone service that is not captured by current representative data. These disruptions are costing jobs, reducing healthcare access, and compromising personal support critical for health. These problems will worsen as healthcare moves to remote delivery.

I urge the FCC to consider these inevitable disruptions when investing in broadband enabled health infrastructure, particularly telehealth. These disruptions—due to unpaid bills; running out of Lifeline or pre-pay minutes; the inability to pay for repairs—compromise healthcare and exacerbate poverty.

Given this, I urge **two specific recommendations**. First, as the federal government rolls out telehealth programs, **it is essential to collect initial and ongoing data on rates of and reasons for short-term computer and cellphone disconnection.** People that run out of cellphone minutes are less likely to have a landline phone, creating a new type of phonelessness. Also, cellphones usually serve as a primary means of Internet service for the poor. In other words, disconnection may be widespread and consequential; without better data it is impossible to understand or address this problem.

Second, the FCC should consider pressuring states to **provide unlimited Lifeline minutes to consumers** if they expect to effectively implement telehealth programs. My data across different states suggests that having

unlimited minutes helps to reduce disconnection and minimize the risk of changing telephone numbers—both of which are essential to keeping patients in contact with caseworkers, doctors, employers, and others that provide crucial services. Although young users may compensate with Internet-based voice services, older users are less likely to do so. For example, one woman in my study runs out of minutes every month because phone calls to doctors are frequent and long. By the end of the month her caseworkers and doctors cannot reach her.

For telehealth and broadband enabled health care to succeed patients must have *stable* access. Addressing current research gaps is a first step in building broadband enabled health infrastructure that works for the long-term.

Thank you for your time. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Amy Gonzales, PhD
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Indiana University, Bloomington